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SECURITY INFORMATION

NSC BRIEFING

10 December 1953

BERLIN SITUATION DECEMBER 1953

Part One

I. Soviet Capabilities for Isolating Berlin

A. There have been few changes directly affecting West Berlin's security during 1953. The Communists have, however, continued to increase their capacity for completely isolating the city without concurrent disadvantages to themselves.

II. Highway, Rail and Canal Access to Berlin

A. Highways

1. Four highways are open for traffic between West Berlin and the Federal Republic, but only one of these is open for Allied traffic.

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2. These roads have been bearing an increasing amount of freight traffic and are in poor condition in some areas.
3. There has been no significant harassing of highway traffic since March 1953.

B. Railroads

1. Six rail lines are open between the Federal Republic and West Berlin, but only one is available for Allied traffic.
2. The East zone Reichsbahn has in the past few months tended to follow a policy of improving the service for West Berlin traffic, rather than using harassing tactics.

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3. It has increased the number of trains, cut freight rates and started extensive repairs.

C. Canals

1. Two canal systems are open between West Germany and West Berlin.
2. There have been no attempts to disrupt canal access in recent months.
3. American officials in Berlin have been informed that the Rothensee shiplift will be closed for repair for about four weeks during January and February. This is not considered a harassing measure, but only normal repair work.

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III. Air Access to Berlin

- A. There have been no attempts to harass Allied air traffic in the three corridors since a British plane was shot down in March 1953.
- B. The Soviet-initiated air safety talks which began on 7 April have indicated that:
  - 1. The Soviet authorities do not recognize the legal basis of current Allied air access to Berlin.
  - 2. The talks were used to further restrict, if possible, Allied air access to West Berlin.

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3. The original Soviet proposals for this purpose included reducing the number of corridors, imposing flight ceilings and floors, requiring advance notice for flights and prohibiting combat planes in the corridors.

IV. Isolation of West Berlin from the Soviet Zone and Sector. Soviet authorities have separated West Berlin from Communist territory so that its complete isolation could be quickly imposed.

A. Physical Barriers

1. A considerable part of the West Berlin-zonal border is fenced off, although the Communists discontinued the project last May.

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2. The number of intersector crossing points open between West and East Berlin has remained at 87 since February 1953, although only 25 are open to vehicles.

B. City Transportation

1. Streetcar and bus lines were split in January 1953, and subway lines could be split without detriment to the West Berlin transportation system.
2. If the elevated, now operated by East Berlin, were split, the Western part could not be independently operated.

C. Utilities

1. Berlin's gas, water and electric power facilities operate independently in the East and West sectors.

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2. The sewage system continues to function as a unit, but its division would harm both parts of the city.

3. The lines connecting automatic telephone exchanges in East and West Berlin were discontinued in May 1952, and in April 1953 Communist authorities actually cut 74 of the 75 circuits. Soviet officials have refused to accede to Western requests for restoration of service.

V. Postal Service to East Berlin and the Soviet Zone

A. All mail from West Germany and West Berlin is routed through the post office in East Berlin for censorship and inspection of all packages.

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B. Postal authorities maintain strict regulation of size and content of the packages.

C. Religious and charitable services in West Germany now send approximately two million postal packages of food to East Germany per month.

VI. Rail and Canal By-passes have been constructed by the Communists to prevent successful Western retaliation in case of a blockade by cutting Soviet zone routes running through West Berlin.

A. Rail By-passes

1. The northern rail by-pass which can be termed the "outer ring" is completed and is now being double-tracked with improvements in the roadbed. It skirts West Berlin in a wide arc through Oranienburg and down to Nauen.

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2. The northern rail by-pass which can be termed the "inner ring" is about 90% completed. It skirts West Berlin in a tighter arc through Birkenwerder and Henningsdorf, ending at present at Brieselang. The short stretch to the main westbound line at Wuestermark has yet to be completed.

3. The southern rail by-pass was completed in 1950. It circumvents West Berlin through Schoenefeld and Diedersdorf, joining the main southwest-bound line at Michendorf.

B. Canal By-passes

1. A canal by-pass of West Berlin has been completed since the summer of 1952.

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2. However, it will not accommodate barges over 500 tons, which must still use the route through West Berlin.

VII. West Berlin Economy

A. Employment

1. Although employment reached a postwar high during the past summer, about 210,000 West Berliners, or about 20% of the working population, are still without jobs.
2. Between 35,000 and 40,000 West Berliners are employed in East Berlin. Somewhat fewer East Berliners are employed in West Berlin.

- B. Berlin Stockpile. All important items of the stockpile are now at a high level.

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C. West Berlin Exports

1. West Berlin export certificates must now be approved by the East German government, a function recently transferred from Soviet control.
2. East German processing has been faster than that of Soviet authorities.

Part Two

VIII. Soviet Intentions in Berlin

- A. Major Soviet pressure against Berlin would be incompatible with the current Soviet policy of apparent reduction of tensions.
- B. A primary motive of current Soviet policy is the reduction of tensions which might lead to hostilities.

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C. Ambassador Bohlen has reported that most foreign observers believe that the Kremlin's domestic program requires it to continue a long-range policy of lessening tensions.

D. Berlin is a potential source of dangerous tension because of its location and its history, specifically the blockade.

E. Therefore, as long as the Kremlin is interested in easing tensions and avoiding hostilities, it would be unlikely to provoke trouble in Berlin.

IX. Further Division of Berlin

A. Recent experience shows that Soviet authorities are reluctant even to intensify the present division of the city of Berlin.

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- B. The East-West Berlin border was sealed immediately after the June riots, but was reopened completely after three weeks, despite the continuing signs of unrest in East Berlin.
- C. During the West Berlin food program, East German police took away the parcels spasmodically, and train-ticket sales to East Berlin were limited, but the East-West Berlin border was not closed.
- D. These incidents suggest Soviet unwillingness to bear the blame in the West and in East Germany for a division of Berlin, even when there were strong reasons for such a division.

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- E. Nevertheless, Soviet authorities may add limited Berlin border controls when the situation requires it. There has been a report that these will be imposed to prevent West Berliners from buying cheaper food in East Berlin if rationing ends there next summer.
- X. East German Controls. Soviet authorities have turned over some control functions to the East German government recently.
- A. These include interzonal travel controls, permits for shipping goods between Berlin and West Germany, and the East Berlin telephone system.

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- B. Therefore, further harassing tactics can be carried on by this puppet government, which could give the Soviet authorities an excuse for disclaiming responsibility while forcing us to deal with a government we do not recognize.
- C. Limited harassment by East German officials might be carried on, but would detract from the Communist propaganda campaign for all-German talks and German unity, just as major Soviet pressure would upset the campaign for reduced tensions.